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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2076
INFO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002242

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/29/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: PESHMERGA FORCE UNIFICATION, IRAQI KURDISTAN

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Robert Gilchrist for reason 1
.4(b) and (d)

This is a Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT) Cable.

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Peshmerga forces of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) are scheduled to unify by the end of 2007 (NOTE: The PUK and KDP originally committed that unification would be complete by the end of 2006). This requires ambitious regulatory and political measures. The unified force will be deployed first in the Kurdistan Region, and later in other parts of the country upon request by the Prime Minister and approval the KRG President. The new command structure will represent the two dominant political parties whereas future rank-and-file will join the Peshmerga on a non-partisan basis. The Peshmerga will be united organizationally but political control appears shared along party lines. End Summary.

PUK PESHMERGA

¶2. (C) On May 22 RRTOff met in Sulaimaniyah with General Mustapha Said Qadir, Deputy Commander of the Peshmerga Forces of the PUK. General Qadir reports directly to Jalal Talabani, Commander of PUK Peshmerga Forces and the President of Iraq.

¶3. (C) General Qadir told RRTOff there are approximately 50,000 PUK Peshmerga soldiers and 20 brigades. He claims there are about the same number of KDP Peshmerga soldiers. KRG officials have reported to the GOI over the past several months that the total Peshmerga force is 190,000. The General said the PUK Peshmerga field of operations covers Sulaimaniyah Province, the Iraq-Iran border area in Sulaimaniyah Province, Khanaqin and Kifri in Diyala Province, and areas surrounding the city of Kirkuk. (Note: It is interesting he includes Peshmerga units outside the KRG that presumably do not have Government of Iraq approval, e.g. Kirkuk

UNIFICATION OF THE PUK AND KDP PESHMERGA FORCES

¶4. (SBU) The name "Peshmerga" is sacred, General Qadir emphasized, and it will be retained after the PUK and KDP Peshmerga Forces integrate and become a regional guard. He stated that in official documents the term "Regional Guard (Peshmerga)" would be used.

¶5. (SBU) The unified Peshmerga will be part of the National Guard, the General said (NOTE: This formation has not been agreed to by the GOI). The Peshmerga will be financed by the KRG, and although part of Iraqi national defense forces, the Peshmerga will first be deployed in the Kurdistan Region. The units will remain at their current location but will redeploy to other parts of the Kurdistan Region if the security situation requires. Deployment to other parts of

Iraq is possible, if the Iraqi Army (IA) makes the request through the Prime Minister or Ministry of Defense in Baghdad.

The General added that if the IA wants to come to the Kurdistan Region, they must ask the KRG. (NOTE: GOI maintains the position that the GOI can deploy in and outside of the Kurdish region after consultation with the KRG president. Approval by the KRG president, however is not necessary.)

¶6. (C) The General estimated the PUK and KDP Peshmerga Forces will be unified by the end of 2007. (Note: The establishment of a regional guard is mandated in the Iraqi Federal Constitution, Article 121/Fifth paragraph, the KRG Unification Agreement of January 2006, and the Memorandum of Understanding concerning the transfer of Regional Iraqi Control.)

COMMAND STRUCTURE

¶7. (C) General Qadir said the command structure of the unified Peshmerga Forces will include the President of the Kurdistan Region as its Commander and the Vice-President of the Kurdistan Region as Deputy Commander. There will also be a committee, he continued, comprised of the current PUK and KDP Ministers of Peshmerga, their deputies and one high-ranking officer (Major General or Brigade General) from the PUK and KDP. The other members are the PUK and KDP Ministers of the Interior and their respective General Directors of Intelligence (Asayish).

PESHMERGA RETIREMENT PLAN

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¶8. (C) The Peshmerga commanders, the General said, have stressed the rights of retired KDP and PUK Peshmerga. There is a draft law on Peshmerga retirement issues that was introduced by the Peshmerga law committee and which is pending in the Kurdistan National Assembly, he noted. The retirement policy will cover PUK and KDP Peshmerga members and creates a Retirement Committee. General Qadir underscored that the Veterans Peshmerga Association will also facilitate implementation of the Peshmerga retirement law.

PESHMERGA SELECTION COMMITTEE

¶8. (C) The General said the draft law on Peshmerga retirement also calls for the creation of a Peshmerga Selection Committee, and changes in hiring the new members of the unified Peshmerga force, including:

-- Elderly and ill or disabled members will leave the Peshmerga. There will be a policy of promotion within to replace them that accounts for age and seniority.

-- New members will be volunteers.

-- New members will require a security clearance.

-- Hiring will not be based on party loyalty. General Qadir emphasized that the Peshmerga is a Regional Guard that is part of the National Guard, and that political affiliation would not be a selection criterion.

¶9. (C) General Qadir told RRTOff that after the KDP and PUK Ministries of Peshmerga are unified, additional legislation is under review to address other issues relevant to the management of Peshmerga forces, including the questions of uniforms, training, and unit names.

¶10. (C) COMMENT: Peshmerga force integration will be an important process to monitor this year as part of KRG consolidation into a force pursuant with the National

Constitution. KRG officials have stated publicly their commitment to force integration and signed agreements for establishing a regional guard. However, unification means significant political collaboration on the part of the KDP and PUK whose relationship is marked by animosity, suspicion, and competition. The parties decided on a joint Peshmerga command structure that will satisfy the need to unite organizationally without compromising KDP and PUK party control in their respective provinces. END COMMENT
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